Tom Braden POST 11/29/75

Assassination Report: Is It Believable?

Certain of the findings of the Church Committee are not believable.

First, the committee says that Richard Bissell, former chief of the clandestine services, did not inform his chief, Allen W. Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, of plans for the assassination of Fidel Castro.

Second, the committee says that Richard Helms, who succeeded Bissell, did not inform his superior, John McCone, that he had sent poison pills to a hired assassin in Cuba for use against Castro.

Third, the committee says that McGeorge Bundy, President Kennedy's national security adviser, having discussed at length with Bissell the formation of an Executive Action Group within CIA which would be charged with planning assassinations, did not inform the President of these discussions.

Fourth, the committee says that Sheffield Edwards, former security chief for CIA, lied to Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy by telling him that CIA plans to assassinate Castro had terminated with the Bay of Pigs when, in fact, as Edwards well knew, a plan was there and then under way.

None of the foregoing squares with CIA procedures, nor with the way power is exercised in Washington.

Consider the last of the aforementioned findings. In May of 1962, Robert Kennedy was the personification of power in this city. He was not only attorney general and brother to the President; he had been told by the President in the wake of the Bay of Pigs to look after the CIA. CIA employees knew that their heads and their paychecks depended upon his whim. It is impossible to imagine that he didn't know exactly what operations the CIA was planning or that Sheff Edwards could have lied to him.

Again, I know something at first hand of the relationship between Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell. It may be, as the committee says, that Bissell did not inform Dulles of plans to murder Castro, but the likelihood of this being true is of about the same order as the likelihood that the world will enter a new Ice Age within this generation or that beginning tomorrow we shall have 40 days and nights of rain.

In the upper levels of Washington bureaucracy, men do not struggle for money; they struggle for power. That is why a power-holder does not lie to a superior or fail to inform him of that which he ought to know. Bureaucracy does not rest upon honor; it rests upon ambition, a stronger force.

So I do not believe any of the aforementioned findings of the Church Committee, and I do not believe the members of the committee believe them. What is the price of not believing?

If you don't believe the committee, you must believe that Richard Bissell and McGeorge Bundy and Sheffield Edwards and John McCone lied to the committee. Is it difficult to believe that these honorable men individually reasoned that it was wrong to dump responsibility on two other men who could not answer for themselves?

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Which is to say that if you don't believe the findings of the committee you must then believe that John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy knew about the plans to assassinate Fidel Castro and approved them.

I don't find this last belief as difficult to live with as I might once have thought I would. Dwight Eisenhower, so the Church committee says, probably ordered the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. Certainly Allen Dulles tried to carry it out. Were things different under Kennedy than they were under Eisenhower?

Not so much as we once thought. The two administrations were cut from the same pattern. The pattern was the concept of a world divided into "free" and "slave" and of the United States as ruler of the "free." Any disturbance anywhere was a threat to the "free." Like Britain in the 19th century, we had the power and the responsibility to put it down.

We've come a long way.

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